VSI Chase Start Protocol

For long course competition, Virginia Swimming (VSI) is permitting chase starts for long course competition when the conditions described in this paper are met. Two major requirements are needed, first, we must ensure safety for the swimmers and second, we need to ensure we have the appropriate number of officials to qualify times. Chase Starts is another tool available to manage the timelines for long course meets. Other tools that are available for long course meets are to limit entries and to require positive check-in (deck seed) for events that are over 200M.

Chase starts are only to be used for events greater than 100M and involve starting a heat from both ends of the pool. A heat of swimmers is started after the previous heat, which started from the opposite end, has made the final turn and is on their last leg.

The following four topics will be explained:

1. The guidelines for employing chase starts.
2. An overview of the chase start protocol.
3. Requirements for setting up the deck.
4. Setting up meet manager, timing and start systems.

1. CHASE START GUIDELINES:

- Only employ in long course meets.
- The pool depth and starting blocks at both ends of the pool shall conform to USA Swimming Rules.
- For swimmers who are age 11 and older.
- In preliminary/final meet, Chase Starts may only be employed during the preliminary events.
- Individual events with distances greater than 100m.
- No Chase Starts for relay events.
- Requires at least two of the following official's: one for each end of the pool
    - ✓ Deck Referee
    - ✓ Starter
    - ✓ Timing System Operator (CTS or DAK)
    - ✓ Administrative Official
- Recommend the following wet-deck officials
    - o Four Chief Judges, (can be less depending on level of meet and if swimmers are not being notified of any stroke violation.)
    - o At least twelve (12) stroke & turn officials with fourteen as the optimum

The Meet Referee will make the determination if enough officials are available to safely and effectively utilize Chase Starts.
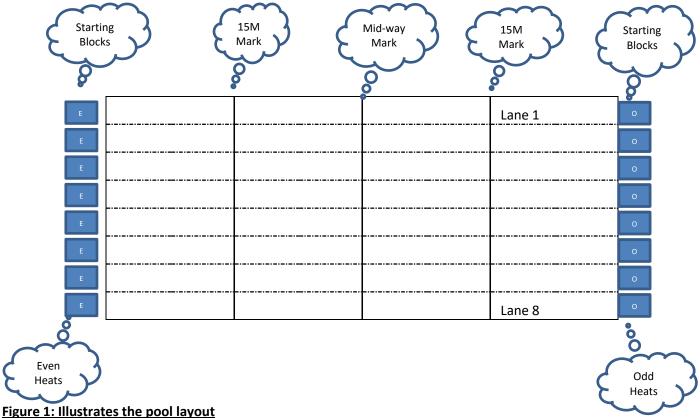
2. OVERVIEW OF CHASE START PROTOCOL

For the events where Chase Starts will be used, swimmers should be assigned a starting end by heat (all odd heats at one end, even at the other). Employing genders at each end, may not yield the most time savings as would by heat. The problem with separating by gender is that may be more women's heats in events then men's heats. Therefore, we do not recommend separating by gender. It is imperative the assignments (even/odd starting ends) remain in place throughout the meet.

For relays, 50-meter events only one end of the pool should be used for starting. To avoid unnecessary delays in the meet for reconfiguring starting and timing equipment, these events should occur either before or after all the 100, 200 and 400-meter events to the maximum extent possible.

Below is an illustration of setting up Chase Starts employing Odd and Even heats. Figure 1 below defines the nomenclature used in the subsequent diagrams.

Figure 1: Illustrates the pool layout

The E on the left side indicates the Even event swimmers, the O on the right side indicates the Odd event swimmers. In the first event, the Odd heat is fired off the blocks from their start end. The blue arrows below define the direction of the swim.
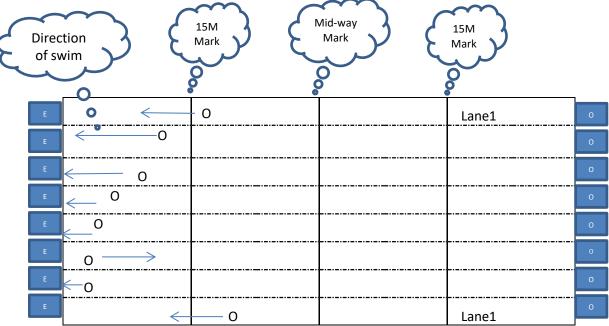
Figure 2: Illustrates the Odd heat swimmers coming into and off their final turn.

As shown in Figure 2 above, the Deck Referee for the Even heat, blows the short series of whistles once all swimmers in the Odd heat complete their final turn and are on their final leg.
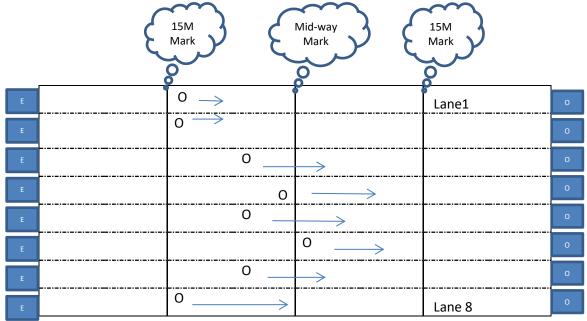

Figure 3 – Illustration of last swimmer in the Odd heat crossing the 15M mark

As the last Odd heat swimmer crosses the 15M mark, the Deck Referee shall blow the long whistle to step up the Even heat as shown in Figure 3 above.

				Lane1		o
E			O →			o
E			O →			o
E				O →		o
E				O →		o
E				O →		o
E					O →	o
E				O →		o
E				O →	Lane 8	o

Figure 4: Illustrates last Odd heat swimmer crossing the Mid-way mark

Once the last swimmer reaches the mid-way mark, the Deck Referee shall hand the race over to the starter, as shown in Figure 4.

IMPORTANT NOTE: It cannot be over emphasized that the timing of the starting sequence shown above is only a-guideline and not a strict rule. Deck Referees are expected to adjust the timing as appropriate to ensure the "chasing" swimmer does not catch up with the swimmer of the previous heat. This especially important when there is a stroke change between events. For example, when the event in the water is breaststroke and the next heat is freestyle and depending on the distance, a freestyler could potentially catch a breaststroker. The same is true for butterfly, there are very few negative splits in the last leg of 200M butterfly. A thumb-rule goal is 15-20 seconds between the heat finishing and the next heat touching on their first turn.

3. REQUIREMENTS FOR SETTING UP THE DECK:

In Figure 5 below is the most effective deck coverage for chase starts. The deck is set with four Chief Judges, six Turn End Judges and six Stroke Judges. When the Odd heat is on the blocks, the stroke officials shall be in the following positions:

- One Stroke Judge shall be positioned at the backstroke flags. This judge will be starting as the "traditional lag" official.
- One Stroke Judge shall be positioned at the 15M mark. This judge shall be starting as the "traditional lead" official.
- A third Stroke Judge shall be positioned at the Mid-way mark.

The traditional lead and lag officials shall observe the swimmers up until the Mid-way mark. Then the Stroke Judge at the Mid-way mark will become the lead, the Stroke Judge that started at the 15M mark will become the lag and the Stroke Judge that started at the backstroke flags will be stationary at the Mid-way mark. When the swimmers come off the turn, the Stroke Judges roles will reverse.
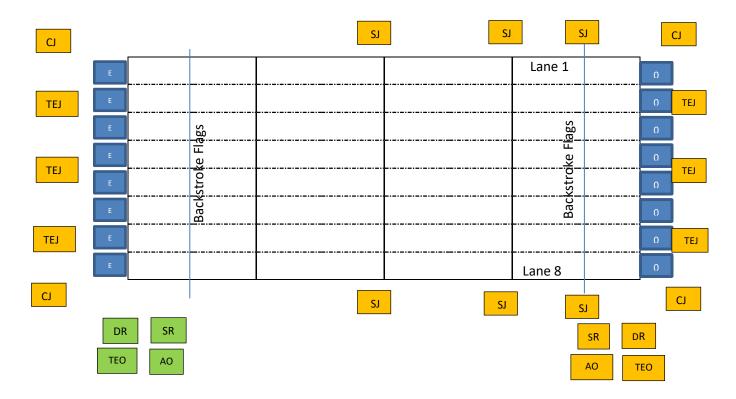

Figure 5: Illustrates deck coverage when employing chase starts

This pattern will continue until the last leg. On the last leg of a heat, when the lag Stroke Judge (Mid-way Judge at start of the race) relinquishes their role, they will walk to the backstroke flags on the Even end to position themselves for the start of the next Even heat. When the swimmers pass the 15M mark at the finish end, the lag Stroke Judge (15-M Judge at start of race) will walk to the 15M mark at the Even end for the start of the next Even heat. Finally, when the swimmers finish, the lead Stroke Judge (Backstroke Judge at start of race) will retreat to the mid-way point.

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The Stroke Judges on the opposite side shall mirror their counterparts.

In summary:

- The Stroke Judge that starts at the backstroke flags will walk from the flags to the mid-way point and back to the flags.
- The Stroke Judge that starts at the 15M mark, will walk from 15M to 15M
- The Stroke Judge that starts at the mid-way point will walk from the mid-way point to the flags and back to the mid-way point.
- The Turn End Judges are judging all heats regardless of start end.

Other Notes on Chase Starts:

- Starters - When briefing the Timers, mention they should be prepared to encourage swimmers to exit as soon as they finish as the next heat coming towards the wall.
- Chief Judges – If protocol is to notify a swimmer of a disqualification, it is imperative that the Stroke or Turn Judge relay not only the lane, but also the heat. This information must be passed over the radio for the appropriate Chief Judge to position themselves to notify the swimmer of their disqualification. Also, so the applicable DR can adjudicate the call properly.

4. SETTING UP MEET MANAGER, TIMING AND START SYSTEMS

Using chase starts for events greater than 100 meters, the equipment set up is like a short course meet when two pools are employed. The difference is that pads at the turn end are finish pads only. Figure 6 explains the equipment set-up for chase starts. The end highlighted in blue, is all connected, same with the end highlighted in orange. If you notice, there is no feasible way to gather split times from the timing system in this set-up.
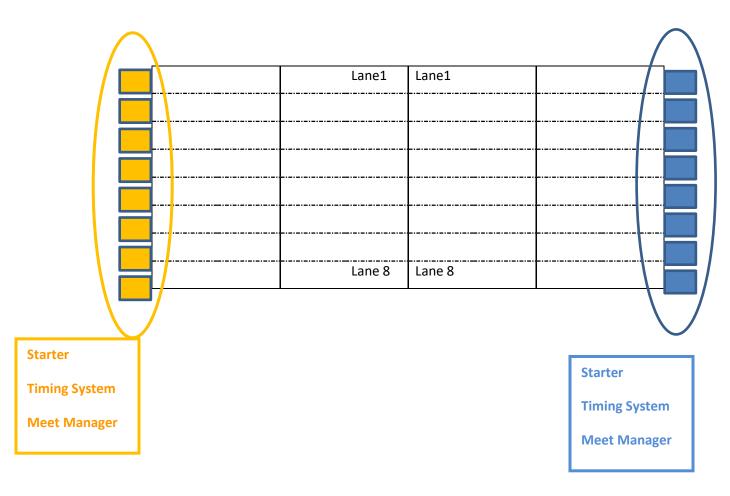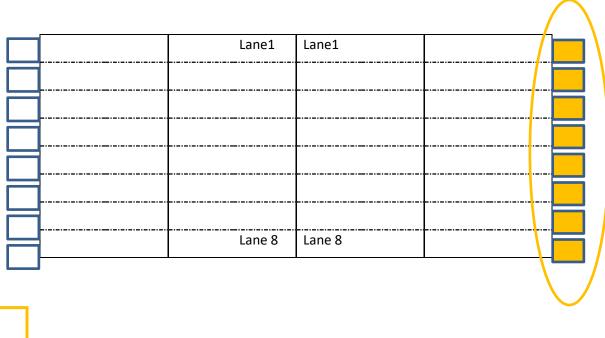
		Lane1	Lane1		
		Lane 8	Lane 8		

Starter

Timing System

Meet Manager

Starter

Timing System

Meet Manager

Figure 6: Illustrates prime & back-up cables, pads, starters, timing systems and meet manager set-up for events greater than 50-meters.

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Figure 7 illustrates how to configure the timing system, pads, starter and meet manager for 50M events. The easiest method is to have a 50M start cable that can be plugged into the Start plug at the finish end. That way that timing system will receive the start signal. Also, if strobes are being used, they will need to reconfigured as well, so the timers at the finish end will see the strobe.

Prior to the 50-meter event, you need to ensure that the pads at the finish end are connected to the correct timing console. This includes the cable from the starter which triggers the timing system. Prior to starting the 50M events, conduct a test start to make sure everything is working correctly. Also, when you change out of 50-meter events, conduct another test start for each end.

It is suggested to retain three computers, all networked, with two of the computers allowed to be in the RUN mode, while the third is designated as ADMIN to pull in the times.

Starter

Timing System

Meet Manager

Figure 7: Illustrates prime & back-up cables, pads, starter, timing system and meet manager set-up for 50-Meter events.

Items to prepare for with using chase starts:

1. The recommended number officials should be available. You may be able to reduce the turn end judges as low as two per end, however, best to follow the recommendations for adequate coverage.
2. Admin team must be onboard and understand how chase starts will work.
3. Teams will need to be notified early on that the meet will be using chase starts. Teams also need to be reminded we cannot track splits using chase starts.
4. This document should be sent to all officials prior to the meet so they can review it.
5. Probably best to add an extra half-hour to the briefing times so CJs can explain how this works.
6. Deck Referee's need to understand the pace of chase starts and the events that are in the water
7. You will need twice the number of timers
8. Coaches and especially swimmers will need to adjust to the pace of chase starts
9. Swimmers need to exit the water immediately after their swim, which contrary to overhead starts.
10. Designate the ends early in the process and notify all teams. It must remain that way throughout the meet.